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Why *Adhyasa Bhashya* Must Prelude the *Brahma-Sutra-Bhashya* – and Why It Needs No Scriptural Citations Within

1) The starting point: what everyone already knows

All human beings undergo experiences. Which experiences vary from person to person, but the fact of *having* experience is universal. This universality matters. If Vedanta is truly a science of the self (sharirika-mimamsa), it must connect with the most indubitable datum available to every seeker: lived experience (anubhava). *Adhyasa Bhashya* begins exactly there.

Ordinary experience can be inspected without prior appeal to Vedanta. We can describe any cognition as a triad: a limited, changing subject (pramata, the knower) cognizes a limited, changing object (prameya) through some valid means of knowledge (pramana). Yet in the midst of this flux – ever-shifting personality, roles, and environments – every person seeks something unchanging: eternal, unconditional happiness. Looking outside for the permanent in what is *by nature* impermanent is a category error; *Adhyasa Bhashya* takes this universally felt but rarely questioned error as its diagnostic point of departure.

By the time one approaches Vedanta Darshana – as set out in the Brahma-Sutras – It is already evident that bondage (samsara) is caused by avidya. Swami Sankaracharya therefore subjects everyday experience to a threadbare analysis to show how avidya operates there as adhyasa (superimposition), and why Vedanta Darshana is the sole means to truly remove it.

2) What *Adhyasa Bhashya* contributes: a universal grammar of experience

By Swami Sankaracharya's time, the very nature and pervasiveness of avidya had been widely misunderstood. If the basic malady is misconceived, the chosen remedy will also be misdirected; and samsara will persist. In the name of philosophical sophistication, various theories of error (khyati-vada) offered intricate accounts of how misperception arises in common life. Swami Sankaracharya peels away these complexities to reveal their common denominator: adhyasa. He shows that this same adhyasa pervades all our experiences, not merely the technical debates of khyati-vada. Adhyasa is itself avidya – the root of bondage – and understanding it precisely points us to the exact antidote. In this way, *Adhyasa Bhashya* harmonizes the prevailing philosophical positions rather than multiplying them.

Importantly, recognizing avidya as adhyasa does not require prior appeal to scriptural testimony (sabda pramana). A sober analysis of experience is sufficient to establish the operative presence of adhyasa. Only thereafter does Vedanta reveal the means to end it.

3) Nature of *Adhyasa*

Adhyasa – superimposition – the transference of the attributes of one thing to another.

- *Adhyasa* explains how the non-Self (anatman) – body, senses, mind, intellect, memories – gets taken as the Self (Atman).
- It also explains how the Self's consciousness “lights up” and seems to appropriate the non-Self's properties (doership, enjoyership), without itself undergoing any change.
- This is only an apparent transformation and not a real change.

Deny *adhyasa* and you must say either (a) the confusion never happens (which collapses the very notion of ignorance and renders liberation idle), or (b) the confusion happens for some other reason - at which point you must answer the crucial question: does the real Self get affected by the confusion or not? If it is affected, it is mutable, which contradicts Vedanta's teaching that the Self is immutable, eternal, and unattached. If it is not affected, then something must be *obscuring* the knowledge of the Self while projecting the non-Self as the Self. That “something” is precisely what Advaita names *adhyasa* or *avidya*.

Thus, in clean logical steps:

1. We observe the *misapprehension* of the non-Self as the Self.
2. Such misapprehension presupposes the *non-apprehension* (obscuration) of the Self's true nature.
3. These two – non-apprehension and misapprehension – are the twin aspects of ignorance (*avidya*), and their working is called *adhyasa*.

This is a universal grammar of experience, not a sectarian dogma. That is why *Adhyasa Bhashya* can, and should, speak without quoting scripture: it asks the seeker to look honestly at what is already happening within the realm of experience.

4) **Ahamkara – mamakara: the subjective knot *explained* by *adhyasa***

Across sampradayas it is accepted that *ahamkara* (“I-ness”) and *mamakara* (“mine-ness”) bind us to samsara. *Adhyasa Bhashya* performs the necessary pre-scriptural surgery: it shows that both “I-ness” and “mine-ness” arise because the properties of the body-mind-intellect (BMI) are superimposed upon the Self (“I am tall, I am happy, I am a doer”), and the light of consciousness is superimposed upon not-Self (“my body acts”, “my mind knows” “my intellect decides”). If moksha requires the total uprooting of this pair, then any rigorous Vedantic exposition must first expose their mechanism. Hence *Adhyasa Bhashya* precedes the *Brahma-Sutras*: it supplies the shared diagnostic that makes the therapy of the Sutras intelligible.

Practically, the arena of this superimposition is the *antahkarana* (inner instrument: mind, intellect, memory, ego). Within Advaita's explanatory framework, antahkarana functions inside the domain of *avidya* and is the immediate locus where past impressions (*smriti-rupa*) trigger the "that-ness" cognition (*tad-buddhi*), catalyzing fresh rounds of superimposition. This naturalizes the rope-snake type of error at the heart of samsaric identity: the Self is "rope", the functioning BMI is "snake", and confusion persists until discriminative knowledge (*viveka*) reveals what is what.

5) From experience to religion and spirituality - without dogma

By explaining the nature of experience – how limitation is felt, how desire and dejection cycles, how the quest for permanence misfires – *Adhyasa Bhashya* establishes the *need* for religion and spirituality as such, not for any one creed. Any sincere human being, regardless of nation or faith, recognizes the problem: an experiential knot that logic can diagnose but not untie. This universality is why the text avoids scriptural quotation at the outset: it seeks natural, cross-philosophical appeal – the corner stone of Sanatana Dharma.

Once the diagnosis is clear – *adhyasa* is beginningless, natural, and the source of doership and enjoyership – the next question becomes live: *What removes it?* At that point, Vedanta scripture (*sabda-pramana*) enters as the unique means for Brahman-knowledge; but the *need* for scripture is earned by prior analysis, not merely asserted.

6) Why the prelude is intentionally non-scriptural

There are several principled reasons:

1. **Avoiding circularity.** The Upanishads are intrinsically valid (*svatah pramanya*); still to demonstrate universality, it is better to establish the need on shared experience and reason, than simply invite the Upanishads as the definitive remedy. Using Vedanta to authorize the very need for Vedanta would be a rhetorical loop for the skeptics of Vedanta.
2. **Universal accessibility.** The *Brahma-Sutras* consider Vedic and non-Vedic positions. A prelude grounded in anubhava and tarka (experience and reasoning) is intelligible to all camps.
3. **Proper pramana-scope.** Scripture is not the authority for day-to-day empirical facts; pratyaksha (perception), anumana (inference), and common logical reasoning suffice. The *Adhyasa Bhashya* sticks to what those pramanas legitimately cover.
4. **Methodological clarity.** The text establishes the problem (the ubiquity and structure of *adhyasa*) and the seeker's qualification, before unveiling the scriptural solution.
5. **Economy and focus.** The prelude's job is to prepare the ground, not to harvest scriptural proofs. (That harvest unfolds in the bhashya proper.)

Note well: Advaita does not lack scriptural support for *adhyasa* or for the adhyaropa-apavada method; the prelude simply does not *need* to marshal them to fulfill its purpose.

7) Yushmad-Asmad and the three states: why the analysis is comprehensive

Swami Sankaracharya famously begins with the mutual exclusion of properties belonging to *yushmad* (“you/that”) and *asmad* (“I”). This crisp linguistic observation scales to a full phenomenology: in waking, dream, and deep sleep (the transactional, *vyavaharika* domain), *adhyasa* accounts for how identity, agency, and ownership are stitched together every moment. The “fourth” (*turya*), being non-transactional (*avyavaharya*), is not a state *among* states but the ever-present reality of the Self that these three presuppose. From this perspective, the Self is not transformed; rather, knowledge of it is obscured while the non-Self is taken as the Self. The analysis is complete enough to justify the need for a trans-empirical remedy without invoking any one scriptural verse.

8) Sariraka to Asariraka: why the *Brahma-Sutras* come next

Within ignorance, the Self is taken as the embodied (*sariraka*). The *Brahma-Sutras* – also called *Sariraka-Sutras* – analyze this embodied standpoint precisely to reveal the transcendental (*asariraka*) nature of the Self.

In that light:

- **Vishaya (subject):** Brahman/Atman as the reality of the seeker.
- **Prayojana (fruit):** Moksha - the cessation of *adhyasa*.
- **Adhikari (qualified student):** One who, having recognized the universality of the experiential knot, seeks the unchanging.
- **Sambandha (relation):** Knowledge of Brahman removes *adhyasa*, ending bondage.

This is the *anubandha-chatushtaya* that *Adhyasa Bhashya* tacitly sets up – exactly the context needed for the first sutra, *athato brahma-jijnasa* (“Now, therefore, an inquiry into Brahman”). The “now” is earned: the groundwork has been laid by the diagnosis of *adhyasa*.

9) Objections and replies (purvapaksha–siddhanta)

Purvapaksha: If the *Brahma-Sutras* systematize Upanishadic sentences, shouldn’t the introduction cite them?

Siddhanta: The introduction prepares the *need* for those sentences by common experience and logic. Quotation is not the introduction’s remit; the *bhashya* proper will weave scripture throughout.

Purvapaksha: Isn't the prelude aimed at refuting Buddhists and Jains, so scripture wouldn't help anyway?

Siddhanta: While these schools are addressed in the tradition, the primary dialectical opponents in Swami Sankaracharya's bhashyas are the jnana-karma-samucchaya-vadins and Purva Mimamsakas (with Sankhya–Yoga in the mix). In any case, a prelude resting on anubhava and tarka is maximally inclusive.

Purvapaksha: If *adhyasa* is central, why not prove it by scripture?

Siddhanta: Because scripture's authority does not extend to validating *empirical* facts; it reveals Brahman. The fact of misidentification is already present to all; scripture is invoked to *end* it, not to establish that it occurs.

10) Not a sectarian polemic: *Adhyasa Bhashya* is not “for Buddhists and Jains only”

It is a misunderstanding to claim that *Adhyasa Bhashya* was written chiefly for Buddhists and Jains, or that Swami Sankaracharya's Advaita exists merely to “drive away” those philosophies.

1. **Aim and audience are universal.** The prelude begins from anubhava (lived experience) and tarka (reason), not from any sect's texts. Its diagnosis – superimposition (*adhyasa*) – applies to everyone who says “I” and “mine,” irrespective of creed.
2. **Primary interlocutors are within the Vedic fold.** In the *Brahma-Sutras-Bhashya*, the principal purvapakshas are the jnana-karma-samucchaya-vadins and the Purva Mimamsakas (with Sankhya–Yoga also engaged). Buddhists and Jains are addressed where relevant and mostly introduced by the source *Sutra*, but they are not the sole or primary focus of the prelude.
3. **Method reveals intent.** A text aimed at demolishing specific nastika theses (e.g., no-Self or momentariness) would argue against those theses directly. *Adhyasa Bhashya* does not; it offers a general phenomenology of error (misapprehension + non-apprehension) that any school can verify in experience.
4. **Soteriology over polemics.** The purpose is to expose the mechanism of bondage – *ahamkara/mamakara* via *adhyasa* – so that the need for Vedanta's remedy is evident. This invites seekers from all backgrounds; it is not a sectarian gatekeeping exercise.
5. **Proper placement of debate.** Where specific doctrines require refutation, Swami Sankaracharya treats them in the relevant adhikaranas of the *Brahma-Sutra-bhashya*. The preface abstains from such refutations by design, so the shared human problem is seen first, clearly.
6. **Positive project of Advaita.** Advaita is not “anti-X”; it is pro-disclosure of the Self. *Adhyasa Bhashya* advances a constructive, universally testable account of ignorance that justifies turning to Vedanta - hardly the mark of a text written only to repel Buddhists and Jains.

11) Where the discussion lands

Adhyasa Bhashya closes by characterizing *adhyasa* as beginningless and natural, the source of doership and enjoyership falsely attributed to the Self, and by pointing to the Upanishads as revealed precisely to eradicate this ill. Having earned the right to teach, the *bhashya* then proceeds to the *Sariraka-mimamsa* to show how that is the Upanishads' single purport.

12) Summarizing

- Experiences are universal; their *structure* is analyzable without scripture.
- That analysis reveals a pervasive confusion - *adhyasa* - comprising non-apprehension of the Self and misapprehension of the non-Self as the Self.
- This confusion explains *ahamkara*/*mamakara* and the felt bondage of desire and dejection across waking, dream, and deep sleep.
- Because the Self remains unaffected, a remover of ignorance - not a changer of the Self - is required; that remover is knowledge, and its unique means is Vedanta.
- The prelude is intentionally non-scriptural to avoid circularity, remain universally accessible, and respect the proper scope of *pramanas*.
- *Adhyasa Bhashya* is not a sectarian polemic aimed only at Buddhists and Jains; its audience is universal, while the *Brahma-Sutra-bhashya* engages specific schools in their proper places.
- Therefore, *Adhyasa Bhashya* must come first, and it need not cite scripture to fulfill its job. It is the universally accessible diagnosis that justifies why the *Brahma-Sutras* – and the scriptures they systematize – are necessary at all.

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